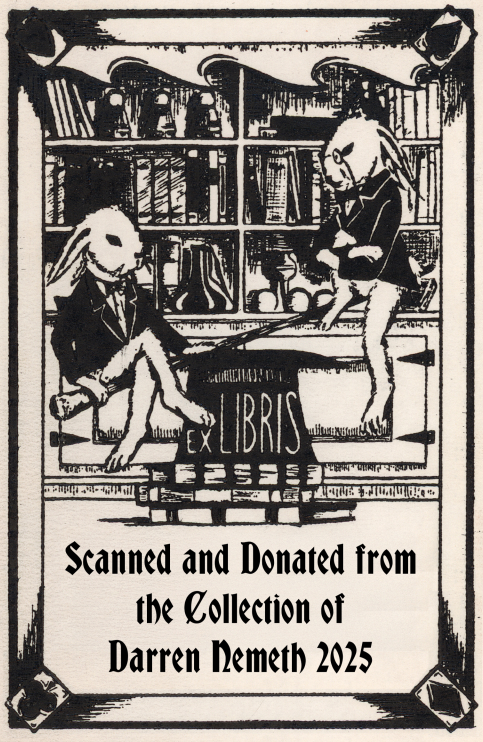
DIAMOND DICK JR. BOYS BEST WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, *238 William St., N. Y.*

No. 275. Philip Kirkpatrick **Price, Five Cents.**

AS THE VILLAINS WERE HELD AT BAY DIAMOND DICK SENT IN HIS CALL FOR AID.—(CHAPTER CLIII.)



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DIAMOND DICK'S DARING DEEDS.

By the author of "DIAMOND DICK."

CHAPTER 151.

SI GOES "TWO ON THE RED."

"Oh, blame the luck! Wouldn't this give yeou the fantods?"

"Never having had a case of the 'fantods,' I can't say. Silas, you seem to have a horrible sorry on."

"Bet yeour butes! I'm purty nigh sick abed, honest."

"What's to pay?"

"Nawthin', an' that's jes' it. The Dimun Dicks have made a clean sweep of all the roughs, an' trouble-breeders, an' gun-fanners along the line of the Tough-Nut and Pick-Me-Up road. Nawthin' doin' no more, nary a blame thing. Yeou could rake the right-of-way from end tew end with a fine-tooth comb, an' not find a bunch o' trouble as big as yeour fist."

"You and the Red-Top One, Si, are a couple of beans on the same number. Got to be head-over-ears in something lively all the time or you get bilious."

"That's where yeou're off, Spotty. Ain't I, Silas Hummer, late of Coon Holler, Wayback County, Vermont, the General Trouble Hunter fer the T. N. & P.?"

"That's your postmark."

"S'posin' I don't skeer up any trouble, what's goin' tew happen? I lose my job, by gum! Araminta Waffles is goin' tew have me fer better or wuss when I can go back tew Coon Holler with a million dollars. I've got five dollars tucked away in my pants pocket, an' it would be jes' my luck, now I've got a good start toward that million, tew be knocked aout of a job. If yeou could only see that Coon Holler gal, Spotty, yeou'd——"

"Look here! Mention that Coon Holler proposition to me again and I'll hand you a hot one!"

"What?"

"You heard, all right! You've been throwing that Coon Holler fright up to me ever since you hit this rodeo, and you've got to duck on it from now on."

"Fright? Who's a fright?"

"Araminta, you dub!"

"Sa-a-y, I'm gittin' mad! Yeou never seen Araminta."

"And I never want to. But I know! She's as homely as a hedge fence; whenever she looks for the time of day she stops the clock; she can't put her head out of doors the first of the week without cracking the Sabbath; she's the biggest freak in Vermont——"

"Whoop! Yow! I'm goin' tew knock yeou plum intew the middle o' next week, Spotty!"

That was the point where things began to happen.

Two-Spot Peters, otherwise known as the New York kid, and the farmer boy, Si Hammer, were standing on the corner of one of the principal streets of Ouray, Arizona, when this little disagreement occurred.

Si was continually harping on Araminta, the girl he had left behind him, back in Vermont, and Two-Spot felt that he had stood it as long as he could.

That was the reason he had goaded Si on to using his fists.

The farmer rushed at the New York kid, and the latter dropped down on his hands and knees with the quickness of lightning.

Si wasn't looking for a move of that kind, and he tripped, went down and rolled over and over.

When he got up, Two-Spot was at the end of the sidewalk, close to the corner, and Si, who was so mad by this time that he could hardly see, let off another yell and jumped for him.

At that particular moment a blanket Indian, of the Apache persuasion, came pigeon-toeing around the corner, and the farmer slammed into him.

Whether Si mistook the Indian for Two-Spot, or not, will never be known.

Anyhow, the noble red man had the wind knocked out of him, and he jumped back, dropped his blanket, pulled his feathered head-dress over his left eye, and spit on his hands.

"Wuh!" grunted the Indian.

"Wuh yeourself!" howled Si. "Ain't Araminta the finest gal in Vermont? Say yes, or I'll lambast the life aout o' ye!"

"Hoop-a-la!" said the Apache, dancing up and down on the toes of his moccasins; "Araminta heap coyote; Araminta all same cross-eyed squaw. Hoop-a-la!"

"I'll make yeou eat them words, darn my buttons if I daon't."

Then Si rushed at the red man and the red man rushed at Si.

They met half-way in a head-on collision, and for all of a minute there was nothing in the air but feathers, and wearing apparel, and language.

But Si Hummer had bitten off more than he could take care of.

When the sixty seconds were up, he was flat on his back on the sidewalk, and the redskin had him under foot.

True, the Indian was not in the best of condition, and all that remained of his head-dress was a solitary feather.

"Wuh!" said the Indian, spurning the unconscious Si with the toe of his mocassin; "Lone Dog big medicine! Ingin get a good many fun this grass. Paleface heap fool; Araminta heap fool. Lone Dog big medicine. Hoop-a-la!"

And thereupon the noble red man, loaded to the water-line with firewater, staggered off down the street, leaving his bright new blanket behind him.

Two-Spot spread out the blanket on the walk, rolled Si over upon it and began fanning him with his hat.

Presently Si manifested symptoms of returning consciousness.

Then he sighed heavily and opened his eyes.

"The little birds, haow they sing!" he murmured.

"He's daffy," muttered Two-Spot. "He got a couple of punches that were birds, but not of the singing kind. Hello, there, Si!"

And Two-Spot grabbed the farmer and began shaking him.

"And looky there," cried Si, raising himself up on his elbow; "the railroad station is tryin' tew climb the telegraph poles! An' the water-tank is turnin' somersets daown the track!"

"Oh, murder!" exclaimed the New York kid. "The Injun must have knocked a couple of wheels loose inside of Si's block. Don't you know where you are, Silas?"

"Who are yeou?" inquired the farmer, giving Two-Spot a blank look.

"Oh, I'm the king of the cannibal islands."

"An' who am I?"

"You're the dub that played two on the red and had the red come back at you with half a dozen—all hot ones."

"What happened tew yeou durin' that cyclone?"

"I was hanging around on the ragged edge, Silas."

"Then it wasn't a buildin' that hit me?"

"Hardly."

"Where's Hoop-a-la?"

"Gone off to celebrate."

"Did he take back what he said about Araminta?"

"I don't think so."

"What did he say about her?"

"I hate to tell."

Si got up and brushed his hand across his face.

"Haow in Sam Hill did this trouble begin, Two-Spot?" the farmer asked, finally recognizing his friend.

"The Injun heard you talking about Araminta, and it was more than he could stand."

"Then what happened?"

"I pass, Si. Forget it. The redskin left his blanket for a memento."

Two-Spot picked up the blanket, and laid it over Si's shoulders.

Si, hardly understanding as yet what was going on about him, caught the blanket mechanically in front.

"Let's go over to the general manager's office," went on the New York kid.

The farmer was a little weak in the knees, but Two-Spot gave him the necessary support, and the two boys were soon at the general manager's headquarters.

Diamond Dick was there; and Bertie, and Handsome Harry, and a tall, slim stranger, who looked as though he had a grievance.

"Gle-ory to snakes an' all things squirmin'!" cried the old Serpent of Siskiyou, as his eyes fell on Si. "Has Hummer j'ined the Piutes?"

Before Two-Spot or Si could return an answer, the tall, slim man made a jump at the farmer, grabbed the blanket and yanked it off his shoulders.

"That's one of 'em!" the man yelled. "Nail him! He's one of the thieves!"

The next instant Si was grabbed about the middle by the slim man and held as in a vise.

CHAPTER 152.

FREIGHT ROBBERS.

It was with difficulty that the Dicks, Harry and Two-Spot were able to separate the slim man from the farmer.

The fight had been pretty well taken out of Si, and he was not able to protect himself as he otherwise would have done.

At last, however, the slim man was hauled away and pushed into a chair, and Si was dropped into another chair, and young Diamond Dick stood between them, the blanket in his hands.

"What do you mean, Mr. Butterfield?" asked Diamond Dick, general manager of the T. N. & P.

"I know that blanket!" answered Butterfield, excitedly.

"What about it?"

"It's one that we handle exclusively."

"Well?"

"I was just going to tell you, gentlemen, the object of my visit when these two boys came in. While

I am talking, kindly see that that farmer does not take to his heels."

"He'll not take to his heels, I'll vouch for that."

"He may, when he learns how we have found him out. He's a thief!"

Si got that through his head, and made a start for Butterfield.

Two-Spot caught Si by the coat tails and jerked him back into his chair.

"Be careful, Mr. Butterfield," said Diamond Dick. "This young man is in our employ, and there's not an honester youth in Arizona."

"How does he happen to have that blanket, then?" demanded Butterfield.

"I got it by hard knocks, by thunder!" declared Si, with considerable feeling.

"Check!" said Two-Spot. "Si has it right."

"Tell us your grievance," went on the old veteran, "and then Si will explain how he comes to have the blanket."

"Our firm, Jinks & Beagle," resumed Butterfield, "does a great deal of shipping over your road, mostly to Josh Murdoch, the Indian agent and trader, whose place is near Pick-Me-Up. I hold a shipping bill here for two cases of merchandise, on the road for two months, never received by Murdoch, and which cannot now be located."

Diamond Dick took the bill and looked at it.

He remembered the instance.

At that very moment there were a dozen claims in the claim department for goods shipped to various consignees along the line of the road which had never been received.

The bill presented by Mr. Butterfield was on account of one of those claims.

"Go on," said Diamond Dick.

"I happened to be at Tough-Nut," continued Butterfield, "and Jinks & Beagle wired me to come to Ouray and find out what you intended to do about their claim."

"We intend to pay it. How does that blanket figure in the deal?"

"That was part of the missing consignment sent to Murdoch. If the goods were stolen somewhere along your line, that young man must be one of the thieves."

"Not necessarily," answered Diamond Dick, sharply. "Where did you get that blanket, Si?" the old veteran asked, turning to the farmer.

"Hoop-a-la!" answered Si.

"Lone Dog," added the New York kid.

Then Si told the circumstances.

While the farmer was talking, Diamond Dick had been making a hasty memorandum on a pad of paper before him.

When Si had finished, the old veteran handed the sheet on which he had been writing to Butterfield.

"Take that to our claim department, room ten," said Dick, "and you will receive a voucher for the amount."

Butterfield got up and took the paper hesitatingly.

"Will it be safe for us to continue shipments along the line of your road?" he asked.

"If you don't think so, don't do it," replied Diamond Dick, shortly. "Good-by."

Butterfield wanted to say something more, but repressed himself and passed out of the room.

Diamond Dick took a cigar from his pocket, lighted it and threw himself back in his chair.

"What's the rub, old pard?" inquired Handsome Harry.

"Freight robbers."

"Thet's the tork! I been achin' fer a chance ter beat ter quarters an' git inter action."

"Before we get into action," proceeded Diamond Dick, "we must go over the ground, figuratively speaking, and get the lay of the land."

"That's the only way to get at it," said Diamond Dick, Jr.

"At least twelve claims have been filed with us for shortages—goods never received by consignees—and each claim runs from five hundred dollars to

fifteen hundred dollars. This wholesale thieving is getting expensive, and must be stopped."

"Give us a tip, old pard, an' we'll stop it all right enough."

"The goods, in every case, were shipments north-bound, and were received and loaded safely at Tough-Nut. In tracing, we have found that the goods disappear somewhere between Whipsaw and Contention; but the agent at neither Whipsaw nor Contention have been able to find anything wrong."

"Thar's a woman operator at Contention, ain't thar?" asked Harry.

"Yes," spoke up young Diamond Dick; "Belle Mortimer."

"This hyer ain't no kind o' country for a woman operator."

"The young woman at Contention knows her business," answered young Diamond Dick, warmly. "She wanted a chance to earn her living, and I thought she ought to have it."

"We're going to make this line as safe for a woman operator as for a man," said Diamond Dick. "The road traverses a lawless country, but we are teaching the trouble-breeders that the property of the Diamond Dicks is to be respected."

"Ye kin bet a poncho on thet!" declared Harry.

"As for this missing freight," went on the old veteran, "it isn't north-bound freight altogether that is missing, but south-bound freight, as well. There is an organized gang at work, and they're the fellows we've got to get hold of."

"We have a clew of the warmest kind," put in the young sport, looking at Si.

"Exactly," answered Diamond Dick. "Lone Dog, the Indian Si had his encounter with."

The old Serpent jumped up from his chair and slapped his biceps.

"Thet's me, pards!" he cried. "I'm the feller ter put the kibosh onter thet red. I'll give him a run fer his auburn chip. Watch me!"

Handsome Harry had started for the door.

"Hold up, Harry!" called Diamond Dick. "That's not the way to get at this."

Harry whirled around.

"Great gle-ory, Dick!" he exclaimed. "Ef we've got one o' the varmints right whar we kin git at him, why not take him in an' make him tell about the rest o' the gang?"

"He's an Indian. You know how hard it is to get an Indian to tell anything by threatening him."

"Thet's so, too. The red varmint had his nerve along ter wear one o' them stolen blankets right inter Ouray."

"The average Apache has plenty of nerve. We'll keep quiet about our clew and let Two-Spot and Si shadow the redskin. If he's one of the gang, as we have reason to suppose, the boys ought to be able to learn a good deal about the thieves, and thus give us something a little more tangible to work on."

"Keno," answered the old Serpent, in a disappointed tone. "I'm willin' ter be side-tracked on one condition."

"What's the ante, Red-Top?" put in the New York kid.

"Why, thet ye give me a whack at any trouble thet shows itself."

"No need of asking for that, old friend," spoke up Dick. "If there is any excitement you'll certainly get your share."

At this juncture a rap came on the door.

"Come in," called Dick.

The operator from downstairs hastened into the room.

"A message, Diamond Dick," said he.

Handing the slip of paper to the old veteran, the operator hurried away, and got down just in time to set the clear-track signal for the "down" passenger, which whistled for the station at that moment.

"Something wrong at Contention," remarked Dick.

"Cough it up, Dick!" said the old Serpent, all attention on the instant.

"Here it is," answered Diamond Dick, and read as follows:

DIAMOND DICK, Ouray:—Several tough-looking men hanging around station and I fear trouble. Can you come up?
AGENT, CONTENTION.

"Thar ye hev it!" exclaimed the disgusted Handsome Harry. "Some cowboys or miners hev come down ter the track ter see the train pull in' an' the gal has got skeered."

"Don't you believe it, Harry," replied young Diamond Dick, jerking open a drawer in his desk, and taking out his revolver belt. "That little girl at Contention is chuck full of ginger, and she's not sending out any false alarms."

"That's the way I look at it," added Diamond Dick, likewise arming himself.

"Aire we goin'?" asked Harry, pulling his guns and looking to the cylinders.

"Bertie and I are going," replied Diamond Dick.

"Blazes ter blazes, an' all hands round!" cried Harry. "Am I ter be hung up ag'in?"

"You're to stay here," replied Dick, rising and starting for the door, "and hold yourself in readiness for anything that develops. Two-Spot and Si may need you to help them take care of Lone Dog. Whatever happens, keep in touch with the Ouray operator."

The Californian didn't like to wait.

If any hot balls were to be batted up, he wanted to be right in line for the first one.

"We're going to Contention on this train," Dick continued, halting at the door and turning to the boys. "Two-Spot, you and Si must give full attention to the Apache. He may prove the key to the entire difficulty."

"Bank on us, Diamond Dick!" answered the New York kid.

"I got a bone tew pick with that same Lone Dog," remarked Si, bristling, "an' yeou can bet yeour uncle's whiskers I'll make him look like a scalped coyote afore I'm done with him."

Old Diamond Dick followed young Diamond Dick down the stairs and out on the station platform, reaching the train just in time to swing up on the rear coach.

CHAPTER 153.

WARM TIMES AT CONTENTION.

When the Diamond Dicks got off the passenger train at the small station known as Contention everything about the place seemed quiet and peaceable.

There were not more than half-a-dozen buildings in the town—saloons and general stores—but, nevertheless, it was quite a shipping point.

"What's the matter, Belle?" asked Diamond Dick, Jr., appearing at the ticket window and looking in at the pretty dark-haired girl who presided over the telegraph instrument.

Belle Mortimer looked up, caught the young sport's gaze and blushed.

"I don't know as there is anything the matter, Bertie," she replied; "it may be that I have brought you here on a wildgoose chase. How do you do, Diamond Dick?" she added, sighting the old veteran at Bertie's side.

Diamond Dick returned the greeting.

"Some tough-looking men were hanging around here, were there, Miss Mortimer?" he inquired.

"Yes; and I had a feeling that there was going to be trouble of some kind."

"How many men were there?"

"Three. They lounged about the waiting-room, looked through the window at me, and then walked around the station and looked through the outside windows. I got nervous, but perhaps there was no cause for it."

"Where are the men now?" asked Diamond Dick, Jr.

"When the passenger whistled for Contention, they made off hurriedly in the direction of the town."

"Were they strangers here?"

"I don't remember ever having seen them around before. I'm afraid I have put you gentlemen to a lot of trouble for nothing."

"I don't know about that," replied Diamond Dick, peering through a window in the waiting-room that commanded a view of the trail leading into the town. "There are three hulking villains coming this way now."

"They simply took themselves off to wait until the passenger went through," said Bertie. "That, in itself, is enough to arouse suspicion."

Diamond Dick passed around into the operator's room, and the young sport followed.

"Miss Mortimer," said the old veteran, speaking quickly, "there have been a number of freight robberies between this station and Whipsaw, and it may be that these unknown villains are part of the gang that has been doing the work. If we can hide ourselves somewhere in this room, possibly we will learn something of the plans of the gang—providing, of course, that these rascals who are coming have any connection with the robbers."

"Where will you hide?" inquired the girl, casting an apprehensive glance about the room.

Diamond Dick pointed to an old ticket cabinet that stood some distance from the operator's desk.

It was a large cabinet, of old-style construction, and had been brought up from Tough-Nut at the time a more modern appliance for keeping tickets had been put in at that point.

The cabinet was taller than either of the Diamond Dicks and at least four feet wide, the upper part having doors like a cupboard.

"We can hide in there, I think," went on the old veteran.

As he spoke he opened the doors and got inside the case.

Bertie followed, standing upright beside Diamond Dick.

"We will not interfere in the plans of these men," the old veteran added, in a low tone, "until the last moment. Our object is to find out what they are up to. Will you be willing to put up with a little rough treatment, Miss Mortimer, in order to help us out?"

"Yes; I know you will come to my rescue at the right time."

It was a plucky answer, and young Diamond Dick shot a glance at Belle which plainly told her what he thought.

The next moment Diamond Dick closed the doors of the cabinet, leaving only a small crack through which he might take in everything that happened in the office.

Barely were the doors of the cabinet closed when a tread of heavy feet was heard on the platform, in front of the station.

Presently the rascally face of one of the desperadoes showed itself at a window overlooking the track, and the next moment the three men entered the waiting-room, pushed open the door leading into the operator's office, and entered unceremoniously.

Belle Mortimer sprang to her feet.

"There's no admittance to this room, except on business!" she cried.

"Shorely not, my leetle pussy-cat," returned one of the ruffians, chucking the girl under the chin, "but we got business hyer."

"Don't you dare to touch me!" cried the girl, leaping away from the man and plucking a revolver from the bosom of her dress.

"Oh, ho! Want ter fight, do ye, ye termagant?"

"Take yourselves out of this room!" commanded the girl, pointing the revolver at the leader of the men.

Before the leader could frame a reply, one of his companions had leaped to the girl, caught her about the waist with one hand and jerked away her revolver with the other.

"Help!" screamed Belle.

Young Diamond Dick thought that the time had come to interfere, and made a motion as though he would throw open the doors.

Old Diamond Dick, however, laid a restraining hand on the young sport's arm.

"Not yet!" he whispered.

"Tie her to the chair," commanded the leader of the ruffians. "Yell as much as ye want ter, young woman," the leader went on, addressing the operator, "it won't do ye any good. Ef the three of us ain't enough ter take keer o' you, we've got ten of our friends within call, see?"

The villain laughed hoarsely and turned to the telegraph instrument.

"What's the call for Whipsaw, young woman?" he asked, as he placed his hand on the key.

Belle Mortimer refused to answer.

"Oh, ye won't tell, hey? Waal, I'll chance 'Wh', and I'll bet something handsome I've got it right."

It was a good guess, for that was the call.

The scoundrel handled the telegraph instrument well, and after he had got the Whipsaw operator, he turned to one of the men and told him to hold his hands over the girl's ears.

The Diamond Dicks were themselves familiar with the Morse code, but they were some distance from the telegraph instrument, with the doors of the cabinet in front of them, and they could not make out the message the villain was sending.

Diamond Dick waited until the man took his hand from the telegraph key, and then whispered to Bertie:

"Now for it!"

In a flash the doors were thrown open, and the Diamond Dicks stood revealed, each with two revolvers covering the men in the room.

"Stand where you are!" cried Dick.

Like lightning six-shooters had sprung to the hands of the ruffians, but the Dicks "had the drop," and the three men stood like statues.

"Try to raise a gun," went on Dick, "or make any other hostile move, and we'll riddle you!"

Neither of the Dicks wanted any shooting, on the girl's account. If bullets got to flying, they feared that she might be hit.

But they were not able to prevent the desperadoes from resorting to their firearms.

The ticket cabinet was an awkward thing to get out of, and the young sport had to cover the ruffians while the old veteran dropped the points of his weapons in order to get out on the floor.

The leader of the gang knew that the only chance he and his companions had for effecting an escape was right then, and he gave a shout, discharged his revolver and proceeded to mix things up.

The bullet the man fired "slapped" into the ticket case, passing uncomfortably close to the old veteran's head.

A second more and Diamond Dick was out of the case.

"Back!" he commanded; "back, or I'll shoot you!"

Bertie was at Diamond Dick's side before the other men could make ready to fire.

The ruffians would have fled precipitately, but were called to a halt, the young sport covering two of them and the old veteran dropping one of his revolvers and covering the leader with the forty-four he still retained.

Diamond Dick's right hand was free.

Keeping his eyes fixed on the leader, the old veteran groped over the top of the table till he found the telegraph key.

Just as his hand touched the ebony disc, a yell came from outside the depot, followed by a volley which broke several windows.

Aside from breaking the glass, however, the bullets did no harm.

"Who is doing the shooting, Miss Mortimer?" asked Diamond Dick, unable to remove his eyes to look for himself.

"Several men across the track," replied the girl.

Belle Mortimer's voice trembled a little, but otherwise she seemed as cool as the Dicks themselves.

"Those are the ten men you spoke about a moment ago, are they?" demanded Dick, of the ruffian he was covering.

"Bet yer life!" answered the man. "You fellers 'll git all the shootin' ye want in about half-a-minute."

"Are those men advancing, Miss Mortimer?" asked Diamond Dick.

"They're standing still," replied the girl, "and seem to be talking."

"The moment they start to advance upon us," went on Diamond Dick, again speaking to the leader of the gang, "or leave the front of the station, that moment we put a bullet through the heart of each of you!"

It was beginning to look as though the outlaws, although thirteen to two in numbers, were to have the worst of the deal, after all.

"Look hyer," said the leader, "all we want is ter git away. Let us go, an' I'll take them men out thar and leave the town, without never takin' a shot at you fellers."

"No you won't," answered the old veteran. "Step to that broken window and tell those rascals out there just what I say—if they fire another shot, or move from their present position, it will be all day with you and your two comrades."

The leader of the gang went to the window and shouted this announcement, then returned to his former position.

"Thar's a deadlock hyer, Diamond Dick," said the man; "you kain't do nothin' an' neither kin we."

"You're mistaken—I can do something."

"What?"

"Send in a call for help," and the old veteran began working the telegraph key, calling for the operator at Ouray.

The call was heard, answered, and then, as the villains were held at bay, Diamond Dick sent in his call for aid.

The message ran thus:

Have Handsome Harry pick up a posse and come at once to Contention on a special. We are two to thirteen, here, and trouble imminent. DIAMOND DICK.

The leader of the gang heard the words of the message as they were clicked off, and his face underwent a change.

"Sabe that?" asked Dick, with a quiet smile.

The desperado did not reply, and just then the rumble of a train was heard.

"What's that, Miss Mortimer?" inquired Diamond Dick.

"The fast freight for Tough-Nut," replied the girl.

"Does it stop here?"

"No."

The fast freight went through with a roar, and if any of the trainmen made out the scene shoved into the grooves in the operator's room, they did not consider it necessary to halt and investigate.

The outlaws on the other side of the track did not take advantage of the moment the train was passing and hiding them from view—fearing, no doubt, that their friends in the operator's office would be killed if any trick was attempted.

The wait was becoming monotonous, especially to the Dicks, whose vigilance could not waver for a second.

Ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes passed, and then Diamond Dick had an idea.

Calling up the agent at Whipsaw, he asked him to repeat back the message recently sent from Contention.

Here is what came back over the wire:

Five cases furnace slag from Ouray on morning freight, worth $5,000 per case. Look out for it!

"To whom was the message addressed?" wired Diamond Dick.

"To James Crowder," was the reply.

"And how signed?"

"Grant Jefferson. Anything more?"

"That's all."

There was no need of repeating this conversation orally.

The leader of the gang, Jefferson, and the Dicks and Belle Mortimer spelled out the conversation as it was clicked off.

"You're Grant Jefferson, are you?" demanded Diamond Dick of the man in front of him.

"Mebby."

"You want those five cases taken from the freight between here and Whipsaw. Is that it?"

"That's what; an' them cases will be taken off, too. They were on that freight that jest went past."

Jefferson's audacity was remarkable.

He thought, possibly, that he might as well be hung for a flock as for one measly old mutton.

For ten minutes more the Diamond Dicks held the whip hand on the robbers; then, with the first sounds indicating the approach of the "special," the ten men across the track took to their heels.

"The special is coming and those men across the track are getting out of the way," said Belle Mortimer.

"Don't pull the trigger, Bertie," said Diamond Dick. "We've won our point, and these men will do us more good alive than dead."

A few moments more and an engine drew up at the Contention depot.

As soon as it had come to a halt, six men, armed to the teeth, sprang down on the platform and made a rush toward the operator's room.

The broken glass showed the newcomers plainly just where to find the scene of the trouble.

The Serpent of Siskiyou was the first man to look in through one of the shattered windows.

"Wake up, snakes, an' tune harps!" he shouted. "Who ye got thar, Dick?"

"Three of the robbers."

"How long ye had 'em in thet kind o' shape?"

"Nearly an hour. Come in here and tie them."

With a whoop the Californian whirled about, dashed for the waiting-room door and plunged through it and on into the office.

The five men who constituted the posse following close after him.

In almost less time than it takes to tell of it, the three desperadoes were disarmed and roped hand and foot.

"Thort ye said thar was thirteen ag'inst ye, pard?" cried Harry.

"There were. The other ten sneaked off when they sighted the special. Where are the boys?"

"Give it up. They left Ouray on the freight some time afore we started with the special."

"On the freight?" queried young Diamond Dick, who had just set the telegraph operator free.

"Shore! They was in a box car an' boxed up in a case supposed ter contain slag."

"Was there any more slag in the car?" asked Diamond Dick, startled at the information he had received.

"Thar was four cases more, makin' five in all. Ye see, Dick, them kids aire wantin' ter find jest whar the robbers do their biz, an'——"

"They'll find out, all right," was the old veteran's grim rejoinder. "I learned, just a short time ago, that those five cases are to be stolen from the freight between here and Whipsaw."

"Thet's what the kids thort would happen!"

"We'll have to get aboard the engine and follow the freight. Bertie, you will remain here and guard these three men and see that Miss Mortimer is not molested. Come on, Harry, you and the others. Two-Spot and Si are liable to be in a pretty tight corner before they are many hours older. They'll need us, and we have got to get as close to them as we can."

CHAPTER 154.

THE "CASE OF SLAG."

Two-Spot and Si, as the New York kid would have put it, were "starring themselves."

They had quite a hunt for Lone Dog before they caught sight of him.

Finally, however, they found the Indian.

He was not hanging about the saloons, but was skulking around the freight yard in the vicinity of a spur track that contained two cars to be picked up by the fast freight.

The Apache was sneaking through the yard in a way that plainly told of his suspicious motives, and the boys, watching him warily, followed in his trail as he proceeded from point to point.

At last Lone Dog climbed into one of the outgoing cars.

"By gum!" muttered Si; "let's shut the red heathen in the car an' send him out of the country!"

"That won't do, Si," replied Two-Spot. "We were to shadow him—those were old Diamond Dick's orders."

"But what's he doin' in that car?"

"It's up to us to get next to that."

"Haow we goin' tew do it?"

Si was clever enough, in his way, although his mind was a little slow at times in grasping the finer points of a deal.

"Mebby he got in that car to steal a ride," said Two-Spot.

"If he did, by ginger we'll git a-top the car an' ride as fur as he does."

The boys were wrong, however.

Lone Dog had not climbed into the box car for the purpose of getting a ride.

In a little while he came out, sprang to the ground, and threw away a piece of coal which he was carrying in his hand.

Then he sauntered off in the direction of the main street of the town.

"What in darnation was he doin' with that piece o' coal?" queried Si.

"Let's go in and see if we can find out," answered Two-Spot.

Climbing into the car, they began looking around and were not long in finding four good-sized boxes.

The cases were marked "Assayer's slag," and were billed to a smelter in Trinidad, Colorado.

On the top of each box a cross had been rudely marked.

Two-Spot rubbed his finger over one of the crosses.

"By gee!" he exclaimed.

"What naow?" inquired Si.

"The Injun did this with his little piece of coal."

"Sure o' that, Spotty?"

"I wish I was as sure of everything else."

"What did Hoop-a-la do it fur?"

"You can ask more conundrums in a minit, Si, than a wise guy can answer in a year. We're onto something particularly warm, but I've got to think it out."

Two-Spot sat down on one of the cases and was there about a minute.

Then he sprang up, darted for the door and leaped from the car.

"Yeou're the greatest feller fer fits an' starts that I ever see," panted Si, chasing after the New York kid. "What's the matter, hey?"

"I've got it, right in my block!"

"What?"

"A gilt-edged, eighteen-karat think, you dub."

"That's what's makin' you tear off like a streak o' greased lightnin', is it?"

Two-Spot did not reply.

He was loping along toward the general manager's office with the intention of finding Handsome Harry.

As luck would have it, the old Serpent was leaning against a telegraph pole at the end of the depot looking off sourly along the track in the direction taken by Diamond Dick, Bertie and the passenger train.

"I say, old sport," said Two-Spot, excitedly, "do you know where I can get a box big enough to hold the farmer and yours truly?"

"Want to git inter a box, do ye?" drawled Harry.

"Ain't I tellin' you?"

"What's the idee?"

"The idea is to find out where these freight robbers have their headquarters and keep their plunder."

"An' ye think ye kin find thet out by gittin' inter a box, do ye?"

"Listen: Do you remember the time, back in Comet City, when the Dicks had me nail them into an organ case?"

"I never 'll fergit thet! It was one o' the slickest plays that pair o' fly-boys ever attempted."

"Well, this game of mine is like that, only different. We've got to get a box and get inside of it before that freight pulls in. Hustle your pins, Red-Top."

Harry couldn't understand, of course, but he saw that time was pressing, and so he helped the boys snap around and find what they were after.

The freight agent gave them a lift.

He had an empty packing-case, rather small for the purpose, in the freight house, and this was carried to the freight car containing the cases of slag.

With the box was also taken a marking pot and brush and hammer and nails.

The New York kid likewise picked up the piece of coal thrown away by Lone Dog.

Two-Spot cleverly imitated the address on the four boxes of slag, printing it on the detached cover of the case which was to hold himself and Si.

While he worked, he explained what Lone Dog had done; and when the marking was finished, he put a cross on the cover of the box, similar to the cross which the Indian had put on the other boxes.

But, even yet, the old Serpent and the farmer were in the dark.

They could not get the New York kid's scheme through their heads.

Right in the middle of Two-Spot's talk, the freight was heard pounding along the track.

"Get in, Si," said Two-Spot.

The Bowery boy sat down in the box, but the farmer hesitated.

"Dog-gone it, Spotty," answered Si; "what's goin' tew happen?"

"If you've got cold feet, stay here. Harry, nail me up. There's no time for any extra chinning, I tell you those."

That was enough for Si.

The next moment he was into the box and the old Serpent was nailing down the cover.

Having finished the job, Harry sat down on the box.

"What do ye reckon Lone Dog marked these cases fur, kid?" he asked.

"Assayer's slag is valuable, ain't it?"

"Shore."

"Then here's the think I had, Red-Top. Lone Dog, we know, is connected with this gang of grafters."

"Thet's the supposition."

"He was in Ouray watching for this shipment."

"It's possible."

"He's marked the boxes for his pards, so's they can't make any error."

"I'm beginnin' ter sabe, Two-Spot."

"If this slag is to be hooked, we'll be hooked along with it and find out how it's done, where the stuff is taken, and who does the job."

"Bully!" murmured the Californian. "Ye're the kid fer my gilt every time, Two-Spot. But ye've overlooked one important p'int."

"What's that?"

"Arter ye git all thet information, ye'll be knocked on the head an' it won't do anybody any good."

"Pass it up! It's not the way I do things."

"I'll bet a poncho it's the way these grafters do things."

"You wait. If this deal works all right I'll turn in a four-eleven alarm, and you and the Dicks must be ready to act on it, and——"

At that moment the freight train bunted into the box cars on the siding, knocked Two-Spot into Si and sent the box three feet along the bottom of the car.

"Gee-whittaker!" groaned Si. "I'm beginnin' tew wish I hadn't come!"

"How aire ye in thar?" queried Handsome Harry.

"Slightly disfigured, but still in the ring," came the muffled voice of Two-Spot.

"Hadn't I better let ye out?"

"Say, Red-Top! I've got a gun with me, and the minute you make a hole through the top of this box I shoot through it. See? Jump off and chase yourself."

The old Serpent was reluctant to leave the boys.

But he finally did so, springing down from the car as it passed the station.

Shortly afterward he received the message from Diamond Dick and that took up his time, so that he had no opportunity to think further of the boys until he and the five men who were with him dropped off the special at Contention.

CHAPTER 155.

CANYON DIABLO.

The boys were very much cramped in their narrow quarters, but they got along fairly well.

"The Diamond Dicks have played games of this kind and won out," remarked Two-Spot. "Of course, we ain't of their caliber, Si, but I think we can find out everything we want to know and squeeze through."

"I feel in my bones, Two-Spot, that we're a-goain' tew have a time," was the farmer's doleful answer.

"You had a horrible sorry on, a few hours ago, because the Dicks had sponged up all the trouble along the right of way. Now that you're right in the middle of a good-sized bunch your worry runs in the other direction."

"I want yeou tew promise me one thing, Spotty."

"Let it out."

"Won't git mad, will yeou?"

"That depends."

"If anythin' happens tew me, an' I don't come back no more——"

"Hold up! I won't stand for it if you're goin' to leak."

"I ain't goin' tew leak. If I git killed, Spotty, I want yeou to write tew Araminta an' say I fell with my face tew the foe. Will yeou?"

"I'll send the girlerino a letter that would bring tears to a pair of glass eyes."

"Tell her, Spotty, that I had a good start toward that million, an' that I would soon have come back tew Coon Holler an' made her Mrs. Hummer."

"Soon! Oh, sister! Can you figure, Si?"

"Yep; jes' enough tew git along. Why?"

"You've been with the Dicks a month and have saved $5."

"Got it right daown in my pants pocket."

"Well, at that rate, you'll be 1,600 years gettin' your million."

Si gave a grunt and dropped back into his corner of the box.

"Yeou ain't got no more heart than a turnip," was all he said.

Not long after this the freight began climbing a grade.

Two-Spot could tell from the click-click of the wheels as they passed over the rails.

The train was going much slower, and there was a pitch toward the rear end of the car.

In a little while the door of the car was rolled open and the boys heard voices.

"Those cases of slag are not in the other keer an' they must be in this 'un," said a voice.

"Hyer's one of 'em," said some one else.

"An' hyer's four more, Jim," said the first voice. "Whar's the train gang?"

"All in the way car, Zeke."

"Think they'll ketch on? This hyer's our fust daylight job, ye know."

"We got ter take our chances. Stand ready ter grab the ropes."

There followed several moments of quick work, and then the box that Two-Spot and Si were in began to slide.

The boys gripped the bottom and sides of their narrow prison, and clinched their teeth.

Directly afterward the box tumbled over and over out of the car, and landed on the ground with a smashing jolt.

The jar caused by the train backing down on the siding and coupling to the cars, at Ouray, was as nothing compared with the shaking up which the New York kid and the farmer boy received.

It was terrific and not to be described.

Both of the lads were bruised, and both of them were stunned into unconsciousness.

When they recovered their wits they discovered that they were being taken some place on a wagon—they could tell that by the creak of the wagon wheels, and the "Git up, thar!" of the driver, and the sharp crack of the driver's whip.

"How are you, Si?" whispered Two-Spot.

"Busted plum in two!" groaned Si. "If we'd

a-been loaded intew a cannon an' shot ag'in a stone wall it couldn't have been wuss!"

"Regular earthquake," returned Two-Spot.

At that point the driver of the wagon shouted to some one who was evidently riding alongside.

"How much furder, Jim?"

"No further, Sam. Ye stop right hyer."

"Hyer? At the ford o' the Dead Hoss River?"

"Yes. Pull up."

The driver shouted "Whoa!" and the wagon came to a standstill.

"I want ye ter back the end o' the wagon down the bank," went on Jim, "so it will be easy ter load these cases inter thet scow. Sabe?"

"I sabe all right. Hev ye got a cache down the river?"

"You bet, right in Devil's Canyon. The Diamond Dicks couldn't find it in a thousand years."

"You're the slickest feller in seven States, Jim."

"I'm slick enough ter fool the Dicks, an' ye kin gamble on thet. The Dicks aire at Contention, now, an' they've got Jeff, Arapahoe an' Pete. But ef they don't git this stuff the Dicks won't be able ter prove a thing ag'in Jeff an' the other two boys. This way, fellers! Snake them cases off an' inter the scow. Thar's one good thing about this water trail, Sam."

"What's thet?"

"Bloodhounds kain't foller it."

Sam, the driver, chuckled as he backed the wagon down the bank.

Then followed a little more rough treatment for Si and Two-Spot, but nothing like the usage they had experienced on being jerked out of the freight car.

"This hyer big case don't weigh more'n half as much as the smaller ones, Jim," said one of the helpers.

"Don't it?"

"No."

"Marked the same, ain't it?"

"Exactly."

"An' it's got Lone Dog's cross on the kiver?"

"Yes."

"Then thar kain't be any mistake. Kin we take 'em all at one load?"

" 'Twon't be best on account o' the current. The river's raisin' an' the current's twicet as strong as it was t'other day. Better take this big case an' two of the others' an' then come back arter the remainin' two."

"All right."

The three cases were shortly loaded and the word given to cast off.

"Whar's Lone Dog?" asked the voice of the man called Jim, when the scow had struck the center of the river and was plunging along toward the canyon.

"At the cache," answered Zeke. "He went down in the skiff about ten minutes afore we got hyer with the wagon, Hank says. Rode his hoss so fast ter git hyer thet he used the critter up."

"Them Injuns ain't got no consideration fer hoss-flesh," grumbled Jim.

"I'm still thinkin' about this hyer largest case," went on Zeke.

From the noise he made, the boys figured it out that Zeke was poling along in the rear of the scow.

"Don't fret. It's all right, I tell ye. The telegram I got at Whipsaw, from Jeff, read five cases of slag, wuth five thousand a case."

"An' five cases is jest what we got."

"Shore; so everythin' must be all right."

"Whar did Jeff find out about the shipment?"

"From a feller in Contention who knows what the minin' comp'ny at Ouray is doin'."

"I see. An' ye sent the Injun inter Ouray ter keep tab, eh?"

"Thet's the way of it. I didn't think the stuff was comin' so soon an' I was hopin' it 'u'd come through on a night freight. But we got through in good shape. Them fellers on the train didn't see a thing."

Jim laughed hoarsely and Zeke chimed in.

At last the scow began to shiver and shake and bob endways and sideways, and, once, it spun around and around like a top, when caught by an eddy.

The water had begun to roar, too, as it shot through the gorge.

"This is wuss'n I had any idee!" yelled Jim.

"Watch yer eye ahead, thar!" shouted Zeke. "Ef we once strike a rock it's good-by Hanner."

"I'll pole her off, all right. Thar's the cache ahead an' Lone Dog waitin' ter throw a rope."

"He's got the end o' the rope tied ter the root of a tree an' it ain't safe enough!"

"He's got no time ter change it, now."

Then Jim lifted his voice lustily.

"It's the throw of yer life, Lone Dog!" he yelled. "Don't fail ter git thet rope to us!"

Lone Dog must have thrown the rope in good shape, for the boys heard sounds as of Jim dropping

his pole, then catching the rope and making it fast to a cleat in the bow.

The scow raced to the end of the rope and halted with terrific suddenness, the rear end swerving around, down stream.

Some one jumped aboard in mocassin feet, landing directly on the box that sheltered the boys.

"Wuh!" came the familiar tones of the Indian. "Where you get um box?"

As he asked the question, the Indian stamped his heel on the cover over the boys' heads.

"Got it out o' the keer, toby shore," answered Jim.

"Me no see um in car," answered Lone Dog.

Two-Spot caught his breath and Si began to shake.

"Didn't you mark that case?" shouted Jim.

"Me no mark um."

"But my telgeram said there were five cases."

"Telegram heap lie. Four cases. Me count um all."

"Thar's a hocus-pocus of some kind hyer," put in Zeke.

"Git an axe on shore, thar, Zeke, an' we'll open the box an' see what's inside."

"Don't need an ax. The kiver was almost ripped off when it drapped out'n the keer. I kin pull it off with my fingers."

"Git holt an' help Zeke, Lone Dog!" roared Jim. "Ef some 'un has been tryin' ter fool us they'll wisht they'd never been born."

Two-Spot reached for his revolver.

Here was a run of luck!

After marking the boxes in the freight car, Lone Dog had made for his horse and had put the animal through in a way that brought him to the scene of the robbery ahead of the freight.

If that Indian had only remained in Ouray!

Reaching over to the farmer, Two-Spot gave his hand a quick pressure.

Si understood.

There was to be a fight—a fight against odds—and the only hope the boys had was in shooting first and not wasting their lead.

The cover of the case, as Zeke had said, had become loosened.

The old Serpent had not put as many nails in it as he would have done if he had been boxing up another kind of freight.

The long, brown fingers of the Indian were thrust under the cover at one end of the loosened boards while Zeke's fingers were pushed under the opposite end.

There was a tug and a strain, but the cover refused to yield.

"You'll hev ter git the ax, Zeke," said Jim.

"All right," replied Zeke, and sprang off the front end of the scow.

A moment later and Jim yelled, frantically.

"Thet tree root—it's givin' 'way! Grab the rope! Twist it about a boulder—blast the luck!"

The tree root broke under the strain of the hawser.

Zeke caught at the cable and tried to hold on, but he might as well have tried to stop a Big Mogul engine by gripping the tender.

The current bore the scow away toward the center of the rushing stream and gave Zeke a yank that sent him into the air and tore the cable out of his hands.

An instant more and the scow was plunging and whirling along through the canyon.

"Our poles are gone!" yelled Jim. "Throw us a pole, Zeke!"

"Wuh! Him no got pole! Poles in river. Ingin jump! Jim jump or be killed on the rocks!"

This furious yell burst from Lone Dog.

In a twinkling the boys heard a splash in the river, even above the ripping roar of the racing waters.

"Jump, Jim!" yelled Zeke, from the shore. "Jump, or ye'll be killed on the rocks!"

There followed another splash.

"Gosh-all-fishhooks!" cried Si. "Here we aire, boxed up in a boat that's runnin' away an' carryin' us plum tew deestruction!"

"I'd rather take chances with the river than with that outfit!" Two-Spot called back, and began hammering on the inside of the cover with the butt of his revolver. "Knock this cover off, Si, if you can. It won't do to go into the river in a trap like this!"

Si jerked out his revolver and began hammering like mad.

Right in the midst of their wild efforts to free themselves the scow struck on a rock with a splintering crash, the box was hurled sideways, and Zeke, Jim and Lone Dog—the two latter having pulled themselves out of the flood—watched the big case drop into the current, go bobbing along for a moment and then settle out of sight.

CHAPTER 156.

HAND TO HAND.

Two-Spot felt himself going down and down, the box whirling over and over under the force of the current.

Fortunately for the boys, the cover of the box had been loosened sufficiently so that the wrenching it received as it was driven along forced it off completely.

The New York kid, with very little exertion on his own part, was carried out and away from the box and to the surface, where he expelled the water that had gotten into his mouth and caught his lungs full of fresh air.

The next instant he was carried down again, hurled against a rock and rendered helpless.

Dizzy and weak, he gave himself up for lost, and submitted passively to the roaring waters as they raced him along through their churning flood.

Suddenly he realized that he was supported.

There was an arm around him, and he was at the surface of the river, now whirling about in the eddies, and now shooting ahead with lightning speed.

"How aire yeou, Spotty?" cried a shrill voice in Two-Spot's ear.

It was Si!

The farmer had one arm about the New York kid's waist and was clinging to a log with the other.

"About half and half," spluttered Two-Spot. "How's yourself?"

"Fine as a fiddle, by gum! Right tew hum in the water. Araminta always said I was more'n half sucker——"

"I'll paste Araminta for that if I ever get close enough," muttered Two-Spot.

Si was never in so tight a fix that he could not think of the Coon Holler girl, nor was Two-Spot ever so far gone that he didn't have a "come back" for any remark that struck his fancy.

"Can yeou climb up on the log, Spotty?" asked Si, who was blowing like a porpoise. "The arm that's holdin' yeou feels like it was playin' aout."

"I'll make a stagger to try," answered Two-Spot.

His "stagger" succeeded, and he got astride one end of the log while Si mounted the other end, and they hung on like grim death, teetering up and down in the waves and whirling now one way and now another.

"If it hadn't been for you, Si, I'd have been a goner by this time," observed Two-Spot.

"Mebby yeou'll be a goner yet, Spotty," was the farmer's grim answer.

"I'll chance the rest of the trip."

"Ain't out o' the woods, by a blame sight."

"Better here than back there with Lone Dog."

"Bet yeour bottom dollar! S-a-y, we're a-gittin' aout of the gulch!"

"Correct! Guess we could make a landing if we tried. What do you think, Si?"

"That's what I think."

"Then let's try."

The river broadened suddenly, and there was a break in the canyon walls on both sides.

Lowering themselves down into the water, the boys abandoned the log, which had stood them in such good stead, and began making boldly for the right-hand shore.

Si, being quite a little taller than Two-Spot, found bottom first, and, catching hold of his companion, waded ashore.

As soon as they were well up the stony bank, both boys dropped down, pretty well worn out.

It was several minutes before either of them could speak.

"How'd you like to try it over again, Si?" asked the New York kid.

"We couldn't do it ag'in an' git through with oaur scalps," replied Si. "It was only a chance that we got through this time."

"No joke about that."

"Got yeour shootin' iron, Spot?"

"I got separated from the revolver the minute I shot out of that box."

"I didn't get separated from mine," chuckled Si, lifting the tails of his dripping coat and showing how he had tied his revolver about his waist with a piece of rope.

"Suppose you had occasion to use that all of a sudden," remarked the New York kid.

"Couldn't dew it, that's all. I'd have tew ask t'other feller tew wait till I untied the knot."

"Mebby the other feller wouldn't wait."

"Then I'd be up a stump."

"I thought you used your revolver to help get the cover off of that box?"

"Thet was the other gun. Had two, yeou know,

an' t'other 'un wa'n't so well tied as this here. Naow, if—— Jumpin' Jerushy!"

"What ails you?" inquired Two-Spot.

"Looky here!"

Si raised himself on one elbow and pointed off down the gulch, which was visible for some distance from the point where the boys had landed.

Two-Spot followed Si's pointing finger with his eyes.

What he saw brought him to his feet quickly, bruised and lame though he was.

A skiff was darting toward them, Lone Dog on his knees in the bow, and a white man on his knees at the stern.

Both the Indian and the white man were using the paddles skillfully, and had caught sight of the boys.

"I wonder if we're ever goin' tew git rid o' them fellers," growled Si, getting up.

"With only one gun between us," observed Two-Spot, "it's a safe-money break that we'd better have a foot race. Come on, Si."

The New York kid started back through the gap, Si tearing along behind.

As soon as Two-Spot reached a point where he could see the mesa beyond the hills, he came to a stop.

"Use yeour feet!" cried Si. "What yeou waitin' fur?"

"Blockaded!" answered Two-Spot. "Three duffers on horseback making right for us!"

This was indeed the case.

The boys were between two fires.

Jim, Zeke and Lone Dog had seen Two-Spot and Si emerge from the water when the box went down, and they had shouted instructions to one of the gang who showed himself at the edge of the cliff wall, overhead.

The man had run back and got two companions with horses, and the Indian and Jim had taken to the skiff, leaving Zeke to guard the cache.

Knowing well that the boys had secured intensely valuable information, Jim had not lost a moment in taking up the pursuit.

"Gosh-hang sich all-fired luck!" grumbled Si. "What's tew be done naow?"

"Push up the side hill and get behind the rocks!" cried Two-Spot. "That's the only thing we can do."

"They'll ketch us, sure!"

"We'll use your gun an' prolong the agony as long as we can."

Swerving to the right, the boys pushed up the rocky rise.

A bullet, fired from a Winchester in the hands of one of the horsemen, spatted upon the rocks at Two-Spot's feet.

"That's a signal to duck!" muttered the New York kid, and he "ducked" at once, getting behind a rock.

Si leaped to his side, back of the make-shift breastwork, and began getting his six-shooter untangled from the rope.

At the foot of the slope he horsemen dismounted, waited for Jim and Lone Dog to join them, and then there followed a rather heated conversation.

"If that white man is Jim," remarked Two-Spot, "he's probably telling the other gazabus how we fooled him."

"I'll blaze away at ole Hoop-a-la if I git a good chance! I owe that red heathen a wallopin' on account o' what he said about Araminta."

"You owe him a few, Si, on account of what he did to you."

"Bet yeour butes! Hoop-a-la put me intew a trance."

"And you heard birds warblin', and saw the water tank, and the Ouray depot, and the telegraph poles playin' tag with each other."

"They're goin' tew git us anyway, I guess. It'll be hand-tew-hand an' plum tew a finish."

"I wouldn't gamble on that, Si. There's a crowd of dust across the mesa in the direction of the railroad track. Who knows but the Dicks are pelting along in this direction?"

Si shaded his eyes with his hand and looked off at the approaching dust cloud.

"It's too good luck tew happen tew us, Spotty. This here's aour Jonah day."

"You're safe on that base. If those are really the Dicks coming, we can attract their attention."

"Haow?"

"Watch."

Two-Spot picked up a small stick that lay within reach, jerked off his coat, placed it over the stick and lifted it up above the top of the boulder.

Sping! sping!

Two bullets tore holes in the coat.

"If we hadn't lost our headgear in the river they

would be just what we want to coax those dubs to shoot," said the New York kid. "But the scheme appears to work all right."

"If them fellers that aire comin' aire the Dick's ye think they'll hear the shootin', eh?" asked Si.

"That's the object."

It did not take the robbers long to find out that they were shooting at a decoy.

They fired four or five shots, however—sufficient to attract the attention of the horsemen who were galloping over the mesa and who could now be distinctly seen, although not close enough to be recognized.

"There are seven of them," remarked the New York kid, dividing his attention between the horsemen and the robbers.

"S'posin' they're more o' this robber-gang?" returned Si.

"We'll have to run our chances on that. Whoever they are they're steerin' this way."

"'Pears as though that feller in the lead rides like Dimun Dick."

"I'll bet a wad of the long green that it is Diamond Dick!"

"Gosh! If it is I wisht he'd push on the lines. Look down there! They're comin' right at us, Spotty."

This was a piece of startling information, and it was entirely correct.

Lone Dog and his four white companions were charging up the hill straight toward the rocks that sheltered the boys.

The Indian, naked to the loins and his copper-colored skin glistening with oil, bounded along in the lead, as agile as an antelope.

He crouched forward as he leaped from rock to rock and gripped a knife tightly in his right hand.

Si took a good hold on the butt of his revolver.

"Ole Hoop-a-la is goin' to git himself intew the biggest row he ever struck," muttered Si, "by gosh if he ain't."

"First come first served," said Two-Spot, grimly, arming himself with a sharp rock. "Take him on the wing, Si. Don't wait till the red gazabu gets right on us."

Si raised up over the rock, rested the muzzle of the six-shooter across his arm and pulled the trigger.

A long, quavering war whoop broke from the redskin's lips.

"Oh, sister!" grunted Two-Spot, when he saw that the bullet had gone wide and that the savage was sprinting right along; "you couldn't hit a barn. Give him another—quick!"

Si gave him another, or tried to; but he had no better luck with the second shot than he had with the first.

Before he could fire a third time, the redskin took the breastworks at a leap.

While still in the air, the New York kid let fly with his rock.

For throwing, few could beat him, and in this case the missile flew straight as an arrow, striking the bare arm whose hand clutched the knife.

A grunt of pain broke from the Indian, and the knife fell to the rocks.

Like lightning, Two-Spot picked up the knife and rose erect just as the savage alighted and whirled upon him.

Lone Dog, uttering another of his tribal yells, plunged at the boy to get back the bowie, and Si pulled the trigger of his six-shooter for a third time.

The bullet grazed the Indian's neck, but did no material damage, and the next instant the Bowery boy and the redskin were gripped together and tumbling about the rocks.

Si did not dare to fire again for fear of striking Two-Spot.

He was wondering whether he had better throw away the revolver and go into the scrimmage with his bare hands or hang onto the weapon, and wait for the Indian's companions to come up.

While he was pondering the question, Lone Dog rolled Two-Spot under him, jerked away the knife and lifted it for a fatal blow.

Then, realizing the importance of instant action, Si raised the six-shooter and fired in a flash without taking aim.

He closed his eyes and shut his teeth, and for several moments after the shot he continued to keep his eyes shut.

When he looked again, the Indian was on the ground, dead, and Two-Spot, pale and breathless, was leaning against the rocks.

"You can swim a good deal better than you can shoot, Si," were the New York kid's first words.

"I can shoot all right, but the bullets don't alwus

go where I want 'em tew," answered Si. "What did I dew tew Hoop-a-la?"

"Finished him; and if you hadn't finished him he'd have finished me. That makes twice to-day, Silas, and I'll give you lief to throw a couple of hot ones into me about Araminta. That will square us."

"I'll chalk it daown, an' yeou can think what yeou got comin'."

"What ails the other dubs?" inquired Two-Spot. "They're a long time following the Injun."

Just at that moment the crack of firearms came from down the hill, and the boys, looking in that direction, witnessed a spirited set-to between the old veteran, the Serpent of Siskiyou and five others, and the four robbers.

It was short and lively—over with before the Californian had a chance to unlimber his deep bass and let out one of his characteristic defis.

The coming of Dick and his comrades had claimed the attention of the robbers in time to keep the latter from following the Indian in the attack on the boys.

One of the four robbers was killed, another was slightly wounded, and the remaining two threw up their hands in token of submission.

Hurrying out from behind their breastwork and down the hill, the boys reached the scene of the fighting just as the men with Dick and Harry had finished binding their prisoners.

"Gle-ory to snakes an' shipwreck!" cried the old Serpent, his eyes on the hatless and water-soaked boys. "What ye been doin' with yerselves, hey?"

"We ain't been doin' nawthin' with aourselves," replied Si; "it's some'un else that's been a-raisin' Cain with us."

"Where's that Indian that we saw running up the hill?" asked Diamond Dick.

"He's up the hill now, Diamond Dick," replied Two-Spot; "and if he comes down he'll have to be carried, I tell you those."

"Was he killed?"

"Sure; Si shot him. It took Si some time to do it, but he got there, at last, just in time to keep your uncle Two-Spot from starting across the divide."

Si began to bristle up and look haughty.

"It's the same Indian that said things about Araminta," he explained.

"The one you got the blanket from?" queried Dick.

"The same feller."

Handsome Harry walked up the hill to convince himself.

"Yeou come along mighty blame handy for Spotty an' me," said Si.

"We had a row at Contention," explained Dick, "and I wired for Harry to come with a posse. He picked up five men and came post-haste on a special, told us what you had done, and we hurried on, leaving the engine at a place where a broken board lay beside the track and the ground trampled as though the cases of slag had been unloaded at that point. The trail was fairly well defined and we secured mounts at a neighboring ranch, and pushed along at a run. The shooting over in this direction is what attracted our attention and made us swerve from the trail."

"Thet Injun is a good Injun now," struck in Handsome Harry, arriving from up the hill at that moment. "Deader'n a smelt. What was you boys doin'?"

The prisoners, including the wounded man, were bunched together, and Dick and Harry's five companions clustered around Two-Spot while he explained what he and Si had been through.

The men who had accompanied Handsome Harry on the special were astounded at the pluck displayed by the boys.

The three prisoners also listened with not a little interest while the New York kid was unreeling his yarn.

"You're a pair of daisies!" exclaimed Buck Caffrey, one of the posse.

"Do yeou guess this 'll git in the papers?" asked Si.

"Why?" inquired Diamond Dick, with one of his quiet smiles.

"Waal, if it comes aout in print, I'd like tew buy up an extry edition tew send tew Coon Holler. If my pictur' happened tew be printed I want tew draw a blue circle araound it an' send it tew Araminta."

"We'll talk about that, Si, when we finish this affair. At the present moment there is a good deal of work before us."

"Are we in it or not?"

"You've been in it enough, I should think," went on Dick. "You boys are to mount two of the horses and ride back to Contention as quickly as you can. You will find Diamond Dick, Jr., at the depot. Tell him to pick up a few men and as big a boat as he can

find, and bring the boat and the men to the Dead Horse ford of Devil's Canyon. See how quick you can make the trip to Contention, boys."

"On the run!" cried Two-Spot, leaping into an empty saddle.

"Bet yeour butes!" cried Si, and sprang to another horse.

An instant more and the boys were away at a tearing clip.

"Them kids aire a couple o' Jim Dandies!" declared Buck Caffrey.

"Now yer torkin', Buck!" exclaimed Handsome Harry. "They've been through enough ter-day ter give ordinary youngsters a case o' paralysis, but not them—nary. They're the clear quill."

"They suit me," said Diamond Dick, and turned away to one of the prisoners—the man whom he had picked out as the leader.

"Well, Jim Crowder," continued the old veteran, with easy assurance, "didn't you know better than to go up against the Diamond Dicks on a freight-robbing deal of this kind?"

Crowder was taken by surprise.

Dick had made a guess at the fellow's name, recalling the person to whom Grant Jefferson had sent the telegram from Contention.

But Diamond Dick saw, by the surprised look that came into the prisoner's eyes that the name was a fit.

"How do ye know who I am?" asked Crowder.

"I know, that's all. How many men have you got at the cache?"

"What cache?" Crowder returned, feigning innocence.

"Oh, come! Jefferson has let out enough so that we know what we're talking about. How many men?"

"You'll find out how many men when you get there."

"Very well. How long have you been carrying on these robbing operations?"

"Stow it. I'm no fool."

"If you think we can't implicate you in the robberies you're mistaken. You've implicated yourself."

"That will come out at the trial."

Seeing that there was nothing to be learned from the stubborn leader, Diamond Dick turned away from him.

"I'm going to leave you five men at this place," said the old veteran, facing the men who had accompanied Handsome Harry. "You will guard the prisoners and watch the canyon to see that none of the robbers try to escape through this end of the defile when we begin our attack to-night. You will have the three Winchesters that belonged to the robbers, together with your own arms, and if the enemy comes at you in force, you can fortify yourselves on the hillside and stand off an army."

"Don't agitate yerself on our account, Diamond Dick," said Buck Caffrey. "None o' the varmints 'll git out o' the gorge while we're on guard."

"I know that well enough, Buck. Harry and I will ride to the ford of the Dead Horse and wait there for Diamond Dick, Jr., and the boat."

"When do ye think o' makin' the attack?"

"We can't do it very well before late to-night."

"Thar's a moon ter-night an' not a cloud in the sky as yet," returned Buck, giving a swift glance overhead.

"Even at that it will be dark enough in the canyon. Come, old pard. Let's ride."

Diamond Dick and the Californian swung themselves into their saddles and started at a gallop for the ford of the Dead Horse.

The roundabout course they were obliged to take made it necessary for them to cover several miles of rough country, and they kept a sharp watch as they rode.

They saw no signs of robbers, however, and reached the ford just at sunset.

Two hours later Bertie, accompanied by four husky-looking, well-armed men, galloped down to the ford, and Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry stepped out from behind the thicket where they had posted themselves.

"All the force I could get together, Diamond Dick," said the young sport.

"They'll do," replied the old veteran, sweeping his eyes over the men approvingly.

He could not see the horsemen very well in the dark, but he knew that Diamond Dick, Jr., would take only the right material.

"How about the boat, son?" asked Harry.

"I couldn't get a large one so I engaged two smaller ones. They're coming a little ways behind us."

"Is there a man among you four," Diamond Dick

proceeded, addressing the men who came with Bertie, "who is familiar with Devil's Canyon?"

"I know it from top ter bottom," spoke up one.

"So do I," added another.

"Is there any way to get out save along the river?"

"Not any. A mountain sheep, even, couldn't climb the cliffs."

"Then, if those robbers are in there, we'll get them, and the stolen goods as well."

Half an hour's time saw the boats in the river, and the teamster who brought the boats announced himself as a candidate for any trouble that might be in sight.

The addition of the teamster to the party brought up the force to eight.

The old veteran, of course, was in the dark as to the number of men in the ranks of the robbers.

Yet he knew there had been ten men across the track at Contention, when he and the young sport had held the drop on Jefferson and his two comrades in the operator's office.

Aside from these, there must have been a force between Contention and Whipsaw to carry out the theft of the cases of slag.

Roughly speaking, there might be anywhere from a dozen to twenty men belonging to the gang still at large and possibly all at the cache in the canyon.

Against these the Dicks were to lead their party of eight.

The old veteran superintended the embarkation.

There were two men in the party who were familiar with the canyon, and one of these was stationed in the bow of each boat.

Dick and two more then got into boat number one, and Bertie, Harry and the remaining man got into boat number two.

"My boat will lead," said Dick; "your boat will follow, Diamond Dick, Jr., far enough behind to avoid a collision."

"All right," Bertie called back.

By then the moon, round and full, had shown itself over the rugged hills.

"Ready?" asked Dick.

"Ready!" came the response.

"Then cast off!"

The boats were pushed from the bank, propelled toward the current, and then, caught in the whirling rapids, were borne at race-horse speed between the dark portals of Canyon Diablo.

CHAPTER 157.

THE MOONLIGHT ATTACK.

The difficulties of the men in the bows of the boats, armed with a short paddle and a pole each, were something tremendous.

To take a boat through Devil's Canyon in broad daylight would have been a tax on an ordinary man, but to stem the flood in the deep shadows cast by the canyon walls at night was a herculean task.

Dick realized, before the first boat had got very far, that it would have been better to wait until the moon had climbed nearer the zenith, since then its light might have trailed into the canyon.

A moment later and he changed his mind on this point.

A sudden bend in the canyon laid the defile parallel with the moon's rays so that, for a stretch of at least a quarter of a mile the light filtered along the surface of Dead Horse river.

"This is A 1," said the steersman, with deep satisfaction.

"Good enough," added Diamond Dick. "If the cache is anywhere along this lighted stretch we ought to be able to see it."

Besides the steersman, who was forced to do his steering in the bow, another of the men was at the stern, poling away from rocks in that quarter.

The third man also had a pole, to be used in case of emergency.

Just now, however, this third man stood behind Dick, revolver in hand.

"Kain't see a thing of the robbers," remarked this third man, Bagley by name.

"They're laying low, Bagley," answered Dick. "It's possible the gang are expecting us."

"Seems like they ought ter be speakin' out. Kin it be they've got away, an'——"

Those were the last words poor Bagley ever uttered.

While he was talking a rifle volleyed out from somewhere up the cliffside on the left, and Bagley, without a word or groan, threw up his arms and tumbled into the river, almost capsizing the boat as he went over the side.

An angry shout came from the men in the bow and stern of Diamond Dick's boat, and a furious yell from those in the boat behind, who had witnessed the killing of Bagley.

"Wake up, snakes, an' throw pizen!" whooped

Handsome Harry. "Git tergether, everybody, an' spread deestruction! Give it to the varmints!"

Dick's quick eyes had scaled the side of the gorge.

He saw the marksman, raised his forty-four and popped away.

A wild yell followed the crack of the revolver, and a black form could be seen to pitch from the cliff, half way up the side, and drop headfirst into the water.

"Life for life!" muttered Dick.

This exchange of shots was the prelude for a rapid fire from the robbers.

Bullets zipped and splashed all around the boats, but none of the other occupants was hit.

"They're wasting their lead in good shape," remarked Dick. "I see some one up the cliff, dead ahead."

"So do I," said the man in the bow.

"Work over toward the other side of the gorge," said Dick.

"Kain't do it, pard. We got ter hug the left side purty clost, jest about hyer. Thar's a reef o' rocks on the right an' ef we git onter 'em we'll be wrecked in half a minit."

"Go ahead, then," continued the old veteran, "but go quick!"

Several rapid sweeps of the short paddle sent the boat within arms' reach of the cliff on the left.

And just then a huge something could be seen tumbling down the almost perpendicular wall of the canyon.

Yells of consternation came from the rear boat.

"Use the paddle—quick!" roared Diamond Dick.

Paddles were used front and rear, and the old veteran, directly beneath the huge object that was dropping toward the boat, sprang to the gunwale and took a header into the water.

The next instant a rock that weighed fully a ton crashed into the skiff, smashed through the wood as though it was so much paper, and the craft was blotted out, leaving two men struggling on the river's surface.

"Blast their pictur's!" boomed the irate old Serpent.

And, at once, his forty-fours began to belch out their leaden hail, the bullets focussing on the point from which the destructive boulder had been loosened.

The hardy old veteran excelled in swimming, as he did in every other frontier accomplishment.

He was handicapped, however, with his weight of clothing and side-arms, and the terrific current.

Keeping himself at the surface, he allowed himself to be swept onward, and very soon, to his surprise, felt bottom beneath his feet.

Raising himself and shaking the water from his eyes, he looked around.

He was still close to the left wall of the gorge, but quite a distance below the point where disaster had overtaken the boat.

In front of him was a smooth stretch of sand, running back into pitchy blackness under the canyon wall, which overhung the beach.

Splashing his way up out of the water, the old veteran turned and gave a helping hand to the steersman of the wrecked boat, who was supporting the other man.

In a moment more all three were safely out of the flood.

Barely were they out of the river when there came a rush of feet from behind.

"Thar they aire!" yelled a voice. "Sweep 'em back inter the river!"

Again was there the music of firearms, sounding the death knell of the man whom the steersman had helped up the bank.

The old veteran whirled about.

He still retained one of his six-shooters, and opened up with the weapon into the foes whom he saw emerging from the darkness of the cavern.

A gap came into the blot of shadow.

The oncomers halted for an instant, then dashed onward again.

The game old veteran and the steersman—the latter weaponless save for a piece of his broken paddle—fought shoulder to shoulder as the gang of robbers swept about them.

They would have been overwhelmed by mere force of numbers but for the timely arrival of Diamond Dick, Jr., Harry and the two men with them.

As the second boat grounded on the sand, the four aboard of it sprang into the thick of the fight.

Revolvers were not used, for, somewhere in the tangled and struggling mass were Diamond Dick and his steersman.

Fist play was in order; and revolver practice, the weapons gripped at the barrels and used as clubs.

The old Serpent, for the first time since the Dicks

had taken issue with the freight robbers, found himself entirely in his element.

"On hand in the nick o' time!" he bellowed, laying about him with vigor and power. "Gle-ory to snakes an' hurricane hustles! I had a fracas comin' an' right hyer is whar I run in the tally. Stir yerselves, crawlers! Come out o' yer crevices an' do the grand right-an'-left! All sashay! Balance on the corners! Ye've opened the ball, ye duffers, an' now ye'll dance ter music furnished by the Diming Dicks an' pard Harry, ther great an' only kibos-manipulator from over by the Golden Gate! Whoop-ya! Tune up, rattles! Key of G, an' G stands fer Git Thar! Seventeen rattles and a button—that's my number—an' Hansum Harry—which is me—is right on deck with both feet an' a pair o' dukes. Sail in, everybody!"

Everybody "sailed in."

Back and forth across the shelving beach the combatants advanced and retreated, the sandy stretch liberally dotted with dusky forms, unable to continue the contest longer.

Bertie had his clubbed weapons in each hand.

As always, he was doing gallant service.

Blow upon blow rained upon him—stiff ones, all—but he bore the brunt, for the most part, without a tremor.

One crack, however, came near to setting him going. It was under the ear, and his arms stiffened and dropped for a moment, and he winked hard to get back his reason.

At the proper moment the gigantic Californian sprang into the breach, swept a circle about his little pard, knocked a knife from the hand of a cutthroat who was aiming at the young sport, and gained time for Bertie to recover.

Then at it again, back to back and shoulder to shoulder, the young sport and the old warhorse, victor of a hundred battles.

It was old times over again, and the rousing play of the fists in that strenuous give-and-take warmed the cockles of the Californian's heart.

"Like we used ter do, pardy!" jubilated Handsome Harry. "Oh, this hyer is gle-orious! I'll rest easy fer a month when we git this gang down an' out o' the way."

Suddenly the glare of a torch showed itself under the rocky shelf and a voice shouted:

"This way, you men of Crowder's! They've got us! Cut for it! Follow the light!"

The light vanished somewhere, leaving a glowing trail.

The voice was authoritative and compelled obedience, and the robbers—those who were able—tore themselves away from the pummeling fists and revolver butts and broke for cover, trailing after the torch.

"Foller!" whooped Handsome Harry. "Push every man to a finish! Give 'em jesse! After 'em!"

Four of Diamond Dick's party were left—two had been slain and two had received injuries which stretched them on the beach, powerless to advance or retreat.

But the staunch old veteran, the young sport, the old Serpent and the steersman with the broken paddle—they were still able to pursue, and they darted after the fleeing outlaws.

Old and young Diamond Dick were in the lead.

Harry's intentions for heading the pursuit were good, but his lumbering proportions held him back.

Under the ledge of rock the dauntless four plunged, dashed over the stretch of sand, hurled themselves into an opening that gashed the solid rock and reached along a tortuous passage cut out by the Dead Horse River ages past.

"We're bound for the cache!" panted old Diamond Dick, his eye on shaft of light that streamed ahead.

"There must be an end to this burrow, somewhere," flung back young Diamond Dick.

"An' when we reach the end," called the breathless Harry, from behind, catching the young sport's words, "we'll hev the varmints whar we want 'em!"

The fleeing robbers, more familiar with the devious windings of the wash-out than were their pursuers, made better time.

The light, despite the best efforts of the Dicks and their friends, receded farther and farther, and the sounds made by the robbers grew fainter and fainter.

Finally, the light winked out into darkness.

Yet still the pursuers stumbled on.

A crash—thunderous and seeming to shake the mountain of stone into whose recesses they had pierced—came abruptly from in front.

Diamond Dick and his companions, halted.

Another crash, nearer than the first, came from behind.

"Catamounts an' hyeners!" cried Handsome Harry. "What's the meanin' o' this?"

"Has any one got a supply of dry matches?" inquired the old veteran.

"I have," answered Bertie, and produced a handful of matches and struck one.

The faint light showed the Dicks a small chamber—a chamber which revealed, to their hasty glances, neither entrance nor exit.

"Trapped!" exclaimed Dick.

"Crawled inter a hole an' pulled the hole in arter us, by thunder!"

This from the steersman.

Diamond Dick, Jr., lighted another match and, looking at the interior of the wash-out instead of at the walls, the four imprisoned men saw heaps of material scattered about, and young Diamond Dick picked up what appeared to be a stick, lying at his feet, but which turned out to be a primitive torch.

One end of the stick was wound with oil-soaked rags.

Touching a match to the rags, a bright light illuminated the rocky chamber, making the surroundings as bright as day.

"Here is the cache," observed Dick.

"Thar's the missin' goods, too," said Harry.

"It looks mighty like we was cached along with the goods," added the steersman, grimly.

"Nature did her utmost to help these robbers when she fashioned a pocket in the cliff wall like this," went on Dick, examining the chamber curiously.

"Did nature do it?" asked Bertie.

"Certainly," replied Diamond Dick. "When the world was made, a huge, uneven fissure gashed this side of the cliff. The fissure was filled with earth and clay. Thousands of years ago the Dead Horse River made an attack upon the earthy matter and ate it, inch by inch, out of the fissure."

"Reckon ye're right," remarked the steersman, "but what good is thet goin' ter do us, Diamond Dick?"

"No good, possibly; but it's well enough to be able to account for freaks of nature such as we now see."

"I don't give a drun fer the freaks o' natur'," went on the steersman. "We'll want ter git out o' this hyer pocket purty soon, an' how we goin' ter make the riffle?"

"Some way will show itself."

The old veteran spoke with confidence.

"How in blazes did them varmints manage ter block us in?" asked Harry.

"They probably had matters arranged. The passage we came through was narrow, and it could be easily blocked by a fall of rock from overhead. The robbers loosened a support as they ran. The support was slow in yielding, and we got into the chamber before the barrier fell. That is the reason the barrier behind us fell after the one in front."

"Ye think the passage leads on out o' hyer?"

"Undoubtedly; or these thieves would merely have bottled themselves up. That, naturally, they wouldn't do. They'll escape by the tunnel and mount their horses at the other end."

"Jumpin' sandhills!" growled the old Serpent.

"You ought to be satisfied, old pard," said Diamond Dick. "We've found the goods, captured the leader of the gang, and, I make no doubt, broken up the organization."

"I wanted ter nail the hull of 'em."

"We couldn't do that, so there is no use worrying over it."

The old veteran walked over to the pile of goods and examined everything minutely.

Young Diamond Dick went with him.

"There are only two cases of slag here," remarked Bertie.

"The other two cases are in the river and the T. N. and P. road will have to pay the shipper $10,000."

"How did two of the cases get in the river?"

"Didn't Two-Spot and Si tell you, Bertie?"

"They didn't have time to tell me anything but to get some men and horses, and a boat, and hike for the ford of the Dead Horse."

"Well, they'll have time, before long, and a

mighty interesting story it is. I'll leave the boys to tell it to you."

"I wisht I was dead sure Bertie 'u'd ever be able ter hear thet yarn," spoke up the steersman.

Had he not fought so well the Diamond Dicks would have thought the steersman a croaker.

A man may be a grumbler, however, and not a coward.

"All the goods are here that were stolen from the freight cars," announced Dick, mentally checking off the various claims; "and there are goods here for which no claims have been rendered."

"They were stolen from somebody else probably," said Diamond Dick, Jr.

"If we can't find the owners we may get enough out of the extra merchandise to pay for those two cases of slag."

"We may, of course."

"You Dimun Dicks are a curus pair!" spoke up the steersman. "Ye're doin' yer figgerin' jest as though we was clean out o' hyer——"

The steersman was interrupted by a deafening blast—an explosion that set stones to falling from the roof of the washout and sent a volley of debris crashing into the chamber from the south wall—the wall through which Dick and his friends had entered.

The steersman, Harry and Diamond Dick, Jr., were hurled from their feet, but Diamond Dick saved himself a fall by catching at a packing case.

A sudden draft of air extinguished the torch and for a moment there was nothing but darkness and silence, and a stifling smell of gunpowder.

"Hello!" yelled a voice, from somewhere in the gloom.

"Hello, yourself," answered Diamond Dick.

"That you, Diamond Dick?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"I'm the teamster that hauled the boats from Contention."

"What have you done?"

"We found some sticks o' giant powder out in thet mole burrow an' blowed the cork out o' thet hole ye got ketched in."

"Where were you when we chased after the robbers?"

"I was lyin' out on the sand with Jim McReady, an' neither Jim ner me was able ter foller along with ye."

"I reckon not," spoke up a voice at the teamster's side. "I purty nigh had the life hammered out o' me. Soon as we could, though, we kim on."

"How did you know we had been bottled up?"

"Reasoned it out," went on the teamster. "We heerd one crash, then we heerd another. 'They're gone,' says Jim. But I says 'No,' an', when we got to the end of the bore we seen fresh rocks barrin' our way. 'They're on t'other side o' that,' says Jim. Thet was my opine, too, an' so we used the giant powder on the bunch o' rock."

"Didn't you have a light?"

"It went out when the blast was set off."

"That is what happened to our torch. Light it again, Diamond Dick, Jr."

Bertie relighted the oil-soaked rags and the teamster and Jim McReady drew closer to Dick and his friends.

"Jumpin' Mariar!" muttered the steersman, dazed at the suddenness with which the deliverance had been effected.

"You see," said old Diamond Dick, calmly, "by the time we were ready to go out there was a way to go."

"But you ain't no mind reader, Dimun Dick. You didn't know them two fellers was going ter blow a hole through the rocks fer our benefit."

"I knew this, however: We had pards on the outside, and they would never have gone away until they found us. We can do no more here, friends," Dick added, "and we might as well get to the fresh air. These fumes of powder are stifling."

The return to the sandy stretch under the ledge of rock was accomplished just in time to prevent three of the robbers, who had been unable to take to their heels with their pals, from making off with the boat.

These three men were bound hand and foot, put

into the skiff, and the steersman who had been wrecked with Diamond Dick piloted the boat down the gulch to the point where Buck Caffery and his four comrades were waiting and watching for signs of trouble.

The old veteran sent instructions by the steersman for Buck to take his six prisoners to town, get more boats and men, together with wagons and teams, and return on the following day.

Diamond Dick and the rest of his party spent that night on the beach under the shelf of rock.

Bright and early next morning Buck came back with all the paraphernalia necessary to remove the goods from the rock-bound cache, and they were taken out, loaded upon wagons and carted to Contention.

From that point all the merchandise that had not been seriously tampered with was forwarded to consignees.

The loose goods, showing no marks to identify shippers or consignees, were advertised. The owners were not found, however, and the merchandise was sold at public auction, the proceeds going to pay the expense bill rendered by the Ouray Mine for the two missing boxes of slag.

An attempt was made to find the slag, but it was not successful.

The boxes had been broken open by the force of the current and their contents scattered all along the course of the Dead Horse River.

A residue of money remained, after the slag was settled for, and this amount the old veteran divided in half and turned over to the relatives of Bagley and the other man who had been killed.

While the loading of the goods was going on, the morning after the battle, Diamond Dick and Harry made search for the exit from the cache.

They found it after a long hunt.

It pierced the mountain from the mesa, and led, by innumerable windings to the barrier that blocked the chamber on the side farthest from the river.

A place was found on the plain near the entrance to the tunnel, where a number of horses had been tethered—which went to prove that the old veteran was right when he declared that those of the robber gang who had fled had made good their escape.

The robbers who had been killed in the moonlight attack had fallen into the river, it will be remembered. The current swept away the bodies, and they were never recovered.

Buck Caffery and his friends buried Lone Dog and the other defunct outlaw on the scene where they fell.

Nine prisoners had been taken, including Jefferson and the two captured in the Contention depot.

They were brought to trial, but, strange as it may appear, the jury acquitted Jefferson and the two captured with him, but sent Jim Crowder "over the road" for a long term, and the others for periods of shorter duration.

It was thus that the incident having to do with freight robberies on the T. N. and P. road was brought to a successful close.

The gang, minus their leader and many of their men, scattered and fled to other sections where there were no Diamond Dicks to interfere with their outlawry.

Two-Spot and Si Hummer came out of the affair with flying colors, and the Ouray *Trumpet* gave up two columns to an account of the plucky work done by the boys.

Si bought $5 worth of the papers and sent them back to Coon Holler, and it is to be presumed that the fair Araminta was suitably impressed.

If she wasn't, she ought to have been.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Next week's issue (No. 276) will contain the story of the Diamond Dicks and the Fatal Trestle, a thrilling account of their adventures with the cattle rustlers of Tanglefoot. Read how Diamond Dick, Jr., was caught on the trestle by a rapidly-approaching train and of the desperate and novel means he took to save himself.

Amateur Journalism Department.

Only two weeks more of the Contest, boys! Have you sent in your story? If not, do so at once. There is still a chance for everybody. See full directions on Page 31, together with the list of the handsome prizes that will go to those who send in the best stories.

Here are some of the best stories received:

The Fate of Two Tramps.

(By Elmer Sutton, Seattle, Wash.)

One pleasant afternoon, as I was standing on a street corner downtown, waiting for a car, I noticed in the passing throng of humanity two drunken tramps. They came bowling along, not contented only by being happy, but they must let everyone else know it.

Ladies would turn up their pretty little noses, gather their skirts about them, and rush blindly on, not even lingering to cast a glance upon the jolly couple, or to be charmed by their harmonious music, for both of them were singing and each a different song.

They both looked to be about the same age, forty years, or thereabouts, and one was rather tall. They had also the customary red nose which is so often to be seen on this class of men.

One wore a sorry-looking plug hat and a pair of slippers that looked as if they had been in a fight, also a clean, white linen shirt that he evidently had "copped" from somebody's clothesline.

His friend also was quite as uncouth in his apparel. He had on a red sweater that was minus half a sleeve. A checkered pair of trousers that not only fitted too soon, but were very much lacking in length, did not at all improve his appearance.

This noisy as well as unsightly pair had not gone far, when a sudden gust of wind removed the shorter one's "dicer" into a rapidly-moving vehicle that went noisily clattering by. Now that individual was in the middle of "Sweet By and By," but somehow the little incident had the effect of closing him up like a clam.

He reached for his much-coveted hat, missed it, grabbed a portly old gentleman's beard instead, but did no farther harm than to yank out a few hairs. But the old gentleman would not stand for it, so he immediately returned the compliment, in the shape of a stiff punch on the jaw. The wronged tramp did not have any more time to receive thanks for his blunders. So he pursued the chase, and ran gesticulating and yelling wildly down the street after the receding wagon. But as luck would have it he tripped and fell sprawling over a starved dog.

Meanwhile the other was having equally bad luck. He slipped on a banana peel, and in his effoart to save himself from falling he despairingly threw out his arms and accidentally caught a young lady by the waist, who, like a woman, gave vent to her feelings in prolonged screams and ear-splitting shrieks, and took a seat beside him, on the pavement. Naturally the chivalry of her escort was aroused, and he "landed" on the frightened hobo.

But a copper came drifting along, pulled off the indignant beau, and proceeded to win honor.

My car came along and so I did not see all the fun, but I saw the best.

A Bear Story.

(By William O'Connor, Pennsylvania.)

Having heard of the good luck of one of my friends in your first contest I thought I would try in this one, being a constant reader of your Diamond Dick and Jesse James Weeklies. I have also read a good many others of yours and can highly recommend them. Well, here goes for my story:

A lawyer coming from Buffalo went in the woods of the Adirondacks with his guide to hunt bear. He said he wanted a bear's skin rug for his office of his own killing, and was going to have it if it took him all season. He stayed in the woods about three weeks, and would not look at deer or small game. At last he had to go home. He sent his stuff to the railroad by a team and walked out himself, saying it would be his last chance for a bear. Sure enough, he went around a big rock and came face to face with a big bear in the trail. He forgot what he was after, forgot he had been hunting for three weeks for this animal, forgot he wanted a rug for his office, and even forgot he had a gun. He turned and sprinted back the way he came, until it came over him that that bear was the very thing he wanted. Then he stopped, turned and went back and saw by the tracks that the bear had gone faster than he had, but it was in the opposite direction.

Buck Bradley's Bravery.

(By Thomas J. McCabe, Philadelphia, Pa.)

Clang! clang! clang! went the bell in No. 4's engine house, the horses raced to their stations, the men came sliding down the poles one after the other, landing with a thud on the rubber mat. They sprang to their places on the engine and truck, and a minute afterward were speeding down the street. Everything else stopped, people came to the windows, and youngsters ran gamely on after the rushing wagons. Presently they turned a sharp corner and rushed down another street. Buck, the driver of the truck, urging the horses onward, but never touching them with the whip. In a house a few blocks ahead the flames were leaping out of the windows.

Buck drove the horses up the street and stopped in

front of the house. The pivot ladder was quickly run up to the fourth story where two women were seen at the windows. Buck's duty was to care for the horses, but when he saw the flames licking at the women's clothes he sprang up the ladder and brought one woman safely down, and went up for the other one. He clasped her in his strong arms, and started to come down, but cries of horror from below caused him to look down, and he saw the ladder afire in a dozen places. He hesitated a moment, then turned back into the building, but not a second too soon, for just as he gained the window the ladder burned away in the middle and fell with a crash into the street below.

In the room, where Buck had stepped from the ladder, the heat was intense, but he did not lose his presence of mind, and the woman was wonderfully self-possessed. Buck saw something must be done soon, and very soon at that, so he said to the woman:

"Put your arms around my neck and keep them there no matter what I do."

She did as she was told, and Buck climbed on the window ledge, and grasped the cornice. He then began his daring voyage. He went hand over hand along the cornice with his human freight.

He looked down and saw beneath him his comrades holding a net, which they could not do under the window because of the intense heat from the flames leaping from the first story. He said to the woman:

"Close your eyes and let go of me, and you will be saved."

After an instant's hesitation she did so. He saw her plunge down, down, turn in the air and land safely in the net. She was taken out and placed among good friends. Then Buck let go himself and landed safely in the net; but when he tried to climb out of the net he fainted in his comrades' arms. He was well and up again in a week and was rewarded with a gold medal by the city, and in six months afterward he was married to the lady who jumped into the net. Most of his company attended his wedding. The lady he had carried down the ladder was his wife's bridemaid and his foreman was his best man. He was also appointed to assistant foreman.

Capturing the Robbers.

(By James Holland, New York.)

It was a lovely day in the month of April, two men were talking in police headquarters, the chief of police and Jack Keene, a young detective, whose name was a terror to crooks.

They were talking about the great train robbery, the robbers had stopped the train, killed the engineer, and then had robbed the passengers.

"I would like to have a chance to capture those robbers," said young Keene.

"I will give you a chance," said the chief, "and be glad to give it. Will you take this case?"

"Yes," said Jack, "I will try and run those robbers down." So he disguised himself and went to a certain saloon where crooks stay most all the while.

He happened to sit near a table where two men were talking pretty low, so he listened and heard one of them say:

"We got a good haul out of that last robbery, and we will lay low until we hear of another package of money coming through."

"Let's go back where the rest of the boys are," said the second robber.

So Jack arose and followed them to the worst part of the city, and saw them go in a deserted house. He followed them in. He could hear nothing for a while, but at last he heard a murmuring of voices. He crept silently over to where they seemed to come from.

A stream of light came through the keyhole and he listened a while and made out that there were at least a dozen men, too many men for one to try to capture. So he went back to the city and told the chief that he had got track of the robbers. The chief got a dozen policemen, and Jack led them back to the den.

They surrounded the house, and pretty soon the robbers began to come out. They were bound and gagged, so that they could not make a noise. Then they were taken to jail and received a sentence of a term of years in prison. Jack Keene received a thousand dollars for the capture.

How Arkansas Bill Took the Town.

(By Frank Teeter, Kansas.)

Last fall, the State Firemen's tournament was held at this place, and during the second day the races were to take place.

About the middle of the races when excitement was at its height, "Arkansas Bill," a cowboy from an adjoining county, thought he could take the town, and he did.

He broke through the ropes on his broncho and quietly pulled out his guns, two large .44's, and defied the marshals and their assistants.

Everything was now excitement, and people began scattering in all directions. Bill put spurs to his horse and dashed up Main street. But at the end of the street he met something he had not counted on. This was a large rope stretched from one sidewalk to the other. His horse plunged at it full speed, was caught by it above the chest and thrown backward so violently that it took a good rider to hold on.

But Bill held on, and to make matters worse for him the pursuers opened fire on him. He got to his guns and replied, also urging his horse again toward the rope, which had stretched some, and was lower than before. This time his horse leaped the rope and Bill fired back at the marshals, scaring the people badly, although no one was hurt.

The pursuers then got upon horses and started after him. He started for the river and got across. One man who had a fast horse overtook him and held his gun toward Bill. Bill quickly got his own into his hands. It was empty, though, and applying it to the other's face, said:

"Hand that gun over!"

You never saw a gun change hands quicker than that did. Bill then made his pursuer get away, but he was captured three weeks later, while at home. He made no resistance, and was given a light term in the penitentiary.

A Rough Night on Lake Superior.

(By M. Gilmour, London, Ontario, Canada.)

I arrived in the town of Ft. William, on the northern end of Lake Superior in the late fall of 1899, on my way home from the western States. Wishing to save expense, I looked around for a boat on which to work my way home down the lakes. As I tried the several large freighters, which were unloading coal and steel rails, I met with the reply that they had all the help they wanted.

A sailor on the freighter, Spokane, of Fairport, Ohio, told me to try the last boat along the wharf, the St. Andrew, of Goderich, Ont., which was loading at one of the grain elevators. Climbing over the rail of the St. Andrew, I asked the captain for a job at anything to work my way to Sault Ste. Marie. He had no need of help, but consented for my paying a passage at a reduced rate, and upon my agreeing to make myself useful if needed. The St. Andrew cleared about 2 p. m., and before dark was well out on Thunder Bay, and the light on Thunder Cape was left far behind. As the sun went down behind a bank of black clouds the water became very rough as the wind arose.

By nine o'clock the lake was very rough. White-capped waves rushed down on the boat, lifting her bow and washing the deck and deluging the firehole.

It was a grand sight and one to be remembered.

As the storm came up the wind howled, and now and again through the blinding rain the lights of passing steamers could be seen for a moment, but only to be lost in the storm. The storm continued all night, and the tossing of the boat kept me awake, but toward morning the storm abated, but all day long the white-capped waves raced by. Toward evening, as the St. Andrew entered Whitefish Bay the water was calmer.

The light on Whitefish point soon came in view on our right, but it was long after midnight when we entered the locks of the canal at Sault Ste. Marie.

Although a rough trip, I enjoyed it, and I would not have missed it for considerable.

The Haunted Cabin.

(By Roy Hall, Arkansas.)

There was once an old house that the people said was haunted, and no one would live there. One dark night a traveler came to one of the neighboring houses and asked the people if he could stay all night. They did not have room for him. But they told him of the haunted house and said:

"If you will stay there, you are welcome to its shelter."

So he went to the house and lit a candle and lay down. He had not been there ten minutes before a ghost came in dragging some chains. The man drew a gun on him and told him to get out. And he did, faster than he came in.

The man watched the ghost until he went into the kitchen and opened a trapdoor and vanished within it. He went next day and got a sheriff and some police. They came back and went into the cellar and discovered a gang of counterfeiters. They captured them and the traveler was made chief of police.

THRILLING SEA STORIES.

BURIED ALIVE IN THE OCEAN.

It was in my twenty-sixth year that my ship was chartered to go to San Francisco. We arrived there safely, loaded, and soon were outside of the Golden Gate, heading for home. Everything went smoothly, and nothing occurred to forewarn me of the terrible adventure the future had in store for me.

We were to the southward of Valparaiso, when I fell ill. It was a kind of faintness, that would suddenly, and without warning, come upon me, so that I often fell on the deck, and lay there until some one could come to my assistance. This continued, without my getting much worse, until we got down off the Magellan Straits, in the latitude of Cape Pillar, or thereabouts.

One day, a gloomy, forbidding day, such as the mariner often meets with down there, I had the afternoon watch, and was superintending one of my men, who was fixing a ratline in the weather mizzen-topmast rigging. The fellow was very clumsy, to say the least of it.

I got annoyed watching his awkwardness; more annoyed, in fact, than was warranted, I think, now that I look back. But I was growing more and more irritable every day, which was probably owing to my fainting spells.

Suddenly I became so excited that I jumped into the mizzen rigging, and was into the top in a trice. I was about to pull the fellow away from his job when a fit came on. A sudden mist clouded my eyes, my senses left me; I reeled and fell from the top to the deck. In my descent I struck once or twice, which caused me to turn over, with the result that I fell on my head.

When I recovered consciousness I was lying in a bunk in the hospital. Still there was a thick mist before my eyes. I could, indeed, see everything so as to recognize where I was, but somehow my eyes refused to move about, and I could only stare straight up at the deck. I tried to turn in my bunk, but I could not; to raise my arm, but I could not; to sit up, but my muscles failed me.

At last the truth struggled into my darkened mind. I perceived at last that I was in a cataleptic trance. The

strange part of it was that my mind was almost as active as ever. I knew all that was going on about me, and I felt an overwhelming terror at my possible fate.

It was soon made known to me. The captain entered my room. I could hear distinctly, as if it were afar off, his footstep on the deck. Then the steward also came in. I heard them consulting together, and both came to the conclusion that I was dead—that my neck was broken by the fall.

"Tell Sails to come in and take his measure. We must bury him to-morrow—while the fine weather lasts," I heard the captain say, and presently the sailmaker came in and measured me for the last hammock I should ever sleep in. I could not feel him, but I knew by his motions what he was doing.

I will not describe how they laid me out on the cabin table and left me there, while Sails, close by, made my shroud. Stitch, stitch, stitch, went his needle, seeming to enter into my brain every time instead of the thick canvas. I can distinctly remember that while I lay there the steward tried to close my eyelids, but they flew up every time and left me the poor consolation of seeing the preparations for my doom.

At last all was finished. The canvas was spread on the deck, and I was laid in it. Then the sailmaker began to stitch me up. He had stitched up all but my face when I heard him say he had lost his knife. A rigid search was made everywhere, but it could not be found, so Sails returned to work, and all that time I was thinking in my dull way what idiots they were for not looking into my shroud for the lost knife.

As I afterward learned, it was the next day at noon, that I was carried on deck and laid on a plank, preparatory to being shot overboard. The men, one by one, took a look at my face, and then it was covered up forever. The burial service was read by the captain, there was a little delay, and then the plank was tilted and I shot into the bitter cold water off the Diego Ramirez.

It must have been the shock that brought me to my senses, for as I sank down, dragged lower by the shot at my feet, I felt my feeling and action return. At the same moment, my right hand, released from its dread inertia, grasped what I instantly knew to be a knife. Mechanically I forced open the blade and ripped my canvas shroud, so that the shot fell, and I began to rise to the surface. In a few seconds, I suppose, although it seemed years, I opened my eyes—for it is a curious fact that while I lay in a state of coma they remained open, yet when my feelings returned with the shock I closed them at once—and saw once more the light of day, which I had never expected to see again.

I was an excellent swimmer, and had soon regained my breath, and cast from me the canvas which impeded my movements. Then I looked round over the waters, and saw that my miraculous escape had been all for nothing. The ship, looking like a great swan, was far away, getting smaller and smaller even as I looked.

I noticed a piece of wreckage floating toward me. Hope once more filled my breast, and I swam toward the piece of deck house, as it proved to be, and, clambering on top, threw myself on my face, and wept for very wretchedness.

Alone on the wide ocean, a piece of wood the only thing between me and death, dazed and weak from my last terrible experience, what else could I do but weep? Soon I began to feel an intense hunger.

The thick mist that suddenly came down satisfied my thirst, but there was nothing to eat. I nearly went crazy as the day wore on.

At last night fell and added the terror of the blackness of darkness to the pangs of hunger. I could never tell the horrors of that first night. It was a wonder I was not stark, staring mad when day broke. The second day passed like the first. Nothing to eat, something to moisten my lips, but no sail in sight. The third day broke with an angry sky and angrier sea, and I saw that before the day closed a Cape Horn gale would be raging with its attendant sleet and cold. I trembled then, for, even though I was almost dead and quite without hope, I wanted to live. By noon the sea had risen tremendously, and it was with great difficulty that I managed to keep upon my raft.

By nightfall the gale was raging fiercely, and I was expecting every moment to be engulfed in one of the terrible abysses into which my raft slipped constantly. This was the most awful night I ever spent—worse even than when I lay, to all appearances, dead on the cabin table. The great waves rolled their crested, phosphorescent heads high above me, who, sunk in a black abyss, heard the gale shrieking overhead. I felt soon that it could not last much longer. Numbed and weak as I was, I clung to my refuge with the energy of desperation and waited bitterly for death.

Finally, an immense wave, higher than all that had gone before, raised its wild head and rolled down on me. My time had come. I was swept like a child from my raft, and carried on the crest of the monster as I supposed to death. But once again the hand of the Almighty was stretched out to save me. I was dashed with inconceivable violence against something solid as a rock. Ropes were floating all around me; I grabbed several and then swooned.

I woke and recognized the old hospital of the ship. Then I thought my burial and subsequent adventures were all a wandering fancy, and that I had never left the hospital. But I was soon undeceived. A kind face bent over me, and I saw once more the features of my good captain. He would not permit me to speak all that day, but on the next I was allowed to relate my story, which I did in a weak and quavering voice, I can assure you. Then the captain told me that, after burying me, as they thought, they had kept on their course for two days, when they encountered a heavy gale, which drove them back on their course again. They shipped a terrible sea, which carried away boats and deckhouses, but it was the last exertion of the gale, for after that it died away.

When the waist was sufficiently clear of water to enable the men to walk there, they had discovered my body entangled in ropes lying in the lee scupper. At first they thought my corpse had been washed aboard again, but on lifting me up they saw unmistakable signs of life, and with great awe and wonder carried me into the cabin.

As to my comatose sleep, the captain said he had never seen anything more like death. He had doubted if the most skillful doctors could have discovered any life in me. He was confident my neck had been broken.

NEW PRIZE CONTEST.

Do You Want To Be An Author?

Boys, the Amateur Journalism Contest has just closed. Its success may be realized when we tell you that we haye received thousands of entries, and the judges have a formidable task before them going through the manuscripts received. Look through the Amateur Journalism Department, and you will see some of the stories that the contestants wrote.

Yes, boys, the Contest was a tremendous success. And, therefore, we are going to start another Contest just like it.

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Take any incident you can think of. It may be a fire, a runaway, an accident, an adventure, or even a murder. It doesn't matter whether you were there or not. Write it up as graphically as you can, make it full of "action," and send it to us. The articles should not be over 500 words in length. The Contest closes ***February 1.*** Send in your stories at once, boys. All the best ones will be published during the progress of the contest. *Remember*, whether your story wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with your name.

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The ten boys who send in the next best "stories" will each receive any four books they may select from the list in No. 268.

FIFTEEN THIRD PRIZES.

The fifteen boys who send us the next best "stories" will each receive any three books they may select from the list in No. 268.

The next twenty boys will receive any two books they may select from the list in No. 268.

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